

EDITORIAL

The imperatives of the global economy dictate that for education to be effective, it should be focused upon the production of individuals with specific skills, who can also carry on lifelong learning. Teaching practice should, by implication, be geared towards helping learners to become more autonomous individuals who are able to accommodate themselves to meeting relentless change in today's world. It should also be geared towards helping learners to possess high order skills and flexibility to adapt to change- including the ability to learn and unlearn *ad infinitum*. Likewise, in the field of foreign language teaching, helping learners to be more autonomous is a necessity at least for four reasons.

First, if they are cognitively, affectively and physically active learners, their learning is likely to be more efficient and effective. Second, teaching for learner autonomy heightens learners' sense of responsibility and gives a boost to their motivation. Third, teaching for learner autonomy certainly prepares learners for future life. Finally, being autonomous entails developing "*communicative competence*" in its entirely intricate and highly interactive knowledge, language components and skills.

An essential part of "communicative competence" is learners' awareness of cross-cultural similarities and differences. The culture component is to be addressed in the EFL classroom so as to widen learners' knowledge and appreciation of their own or other people's culture worldwide.

TEFL in Morocco has witnessed a radical change in the teaching-learning approach to enforce learner autonomy. With these grounds in view, the teaching of English has adhered to a standards-based approach to teaching English as a foreign language, which revolves around the following areas:

1. **Communication** in its three modes; namely, the *interpersonal*, *interpretive*, and *presentational* communication.
2. **Cultures**: Learners will gain deeper understanding of their culture(s) and other cultures in terms of their **perspectives**, **practices**, and **products**.
3. **Connections**: Learners will make connections with other subject areas.
4. **Comparisons**: Learners will gain awareness of cross-cultural similarities and differences.
5. **Communities**: Learners will extend their learning experiences from the EFL classroom to the outside world through active learning.

The five C's and 'learning how to learn' have changed our way of catering for learners' needs and wants, and have led to our rethinking of ways of coping with the teaching of skills, vocabulary, grammar and functions. More importantly perhaps, teachers are now advised to relinquish some of their power and hand over responsibility to learners by changing their attitudes towards their roles and those of the learners', and through the use of a more creative and tension-free type of classroom management. The TEFL scene has also witnessed an unprecedented way of assessing learners' performance as suggested in a series of official documents and specifications.

MATE is usually at the forefront of change. Its role in reinforcing this orientation in the teaching of EFL has been crystal clear in all its regional and national activities. The annual conferences are the culmination of all these activities. At MATE annual conferences, by far the largest of the gatherings our

association organizes, professionals from all education layers are not only able to share views and worries with each other, but also engage in hot and thought-provoking debates and later cascade their gained knowledge and *savoir-faire* to colleagues who have not been able to attend. Valuable presentations, workshops, debates, corridor informal chats give the participants the opportunity to nurture their expertise. During MATE conferences, teachers, inspectors and trainers could attend and run workshops zeroing in on various issues such as standards-based education, active learning, project work, civic education, leadership, coping with large classes, mixed-ability classes, summative and/or formative assessment, self-assessment, ICT, textbook evaluation, etc. Moroccan participants and their foreigner counterparts leave MATE conferences with apparent sense of belonging and accomplishment.

If we continue to exercise the kind of equanimity and sensibleness that have characterized our work as members of MATE for the last three decades, we will contribute to protecting ourselves from resistance and burnout which are lurking in the shadows. We will, by the same token, prevent our learners from growing *incompetent*, *fossilized* or *unable* to hammer their way through in today's *wildly a-changing* world.

By Ahmed Chaibi

Published with this issue,

1. *MATE constitution*
2. *MATE bylaws*
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Edited by:

M. Hassim, E. Fahmi & N. Bendouqi

General Council Meeting

Marrakech, March 11th, 2007

Members Present : M. Hassim, E. Fahmi , N. Bendoouqi, M. Blibil, M. Makhfi, H. Fathi
Others Present: A. Mansouri

Agenda:

1. Partnership with the Ministry of Education
2. Evaluation of MATE Events held since November 2006
 - a. MATE 1st citizenship colloquium
 - b. MATE 3rd ESP conference
 - c. MATE 1st Middle School Seminar
 - d. MATE Days
3. MATE and the British Council.
4. Trips to Bahrain, Cambridge, Jordan
5. MATE 27th National Conference
 - a. Update of preparation
 - b. Task Distribution
6. MATE Bylaws
7. Financial Report
8. Summer Camps
9. Other Business.

The meeting was held in Marrakech so as to give an opportunity to some MATE board members to attend the 1st Middle School Seminar. It was also held at this time to discuss National Conference related issues. At the beginning of this meeting, Mr. Hassim thanked all the members who attended the meeting. He also talked about the progress in the implementation of MATE 2007 calendar of events. Everybody expressed their satisfaction with what had been done so far.

Item 1: Partnership with the Ministry of Education:

Mr. Hassim was invited on February, 2007 to sign this partnership with the Ministry of National Education. He explained how important such a partnership was. It will certainly promote MATE activities. Mr. Bendoouqi also talked about this partnership and the different stages it went through before the agreement was signed. Special thanks go to Mr. Bendoouqi who invested a lot of efforts in such a partnership. He attended all the meetings held in Rabat to discuss the numerous terms in this partnership. It is very important to note that reports about all MATE events have to be sent to the Ministry Secretary General on a regular basis. Last but not least is that the Ministry of Education gave MATE a sum of 45,000.00 MDH.

Item 2: Evaluation of MATE Events held since November 2006

a. MATE 1st citizenship colloquium Marrakech, December 2006

This colloquium was held in Marrakech on 8-9 December 2006. About 60 participants attended it. It was organized in collaboration with Curricula Directorate at the Ministry of Education. The colloquium was a success and a yahoo group was created after the event. Its moderators are Mrs. N. Belkachla, Mr. M. Hassim and Mr. E. Fahmi.

b. MATE 3rd ESP Conference (Agadir, February 23-25, 2007)

Mr. Fahmi gave a short report on this conference. The aim of the organizing committee was to launch such a special event again bearing in mind that it had not been held for 4 years. The previous ESP conference was held in Marrakech, Ourika, 2003. Agadir ESP Conference was a real success for a number of reasons. One of them is that the quality of papers and workshops given was really high. Also important to mention is the participation and contribution of university teachers. We should not forget that one of the aims of the current board has been to bring back as many

university teachers as possible to MATE ELT community. Another very good point about this conference is the participation of undergraduate students, which was highly appreciated by all the attendees. These students expressed and discussed their needs with ELT professionals and ESP specialists. A yahoo group will be launched shortly as a follow up so as to satisfy the needs of ESP community in Morocco.

c. MATE 1st Middle School Seminar (Marrakech, 9-10 March, 2007)

This event was held in Marrakech. 80 participants from different cities in Morocco attended the seminar. Everybody appreciated the quality of Middle School teachers' input and participation. The seminar was successful, and it was the first seminar for this new ELT population in Morocco. The national board will make more efforts to make this event a lot better in the future and to satisfy the needs of this new community of teachers. A problem that occurred during this seminar was that a number of teachers who confirmed their participation did not show up, which cost MATE about 7000MDH. Because of this, the Board suggested asking teachers who want to participate in the future events to pay their participation fee in advance.

d. MATE Days

Since November 2006 and up to the date of writing this report, 14 MATE Days have been held in the following cities in Morocco:

Kenitra, Sidi Kacem, Laarache, Casablanca 1, Casablanca 2, Agadir 1, Agadir 2, Sefrou, Fez, Guelmim, Ben-Mellal 1, Ben-Mellal, 2 Ouarzazate, Rabat ENS.

3. MATE and the British Council

Teachers from the British council have participated and will participate in a number of MATE events. This cooperation between MATE and the British Council has to be made clear. Mr. Hassim has e-mailed Adam, the British Council director on this issue.

4. Trips to Cambridge, Bahrain and Jordan

Three distinguished members of MATE were selected by the Board to represent MATE in three important events abroad. The 3 trips were sponsored by the British Council. Mr. Zaki went to Cambridge, England, Mr. Bendoouqi to Bahrain and Mr. Hassim to Jordan. Mr. Zaki has already sent the report of his trip. Mr. Bendoouqi and Mr. Hassim will send theirs as soon as possible, but during the meeting they gave a brief summary of their trips. The conclusion to be drawn from what they said is that it was a very good opportunity to promote our association and its services. The evidence is that a number of participants from Bahrain and other Gulf Countries will attend the 27th National Conference.

5. MATE 27th National Conference

The Board discussed all that is related to the preparations for the 27th national conference.

a. Update of preparation

- Reservation has been made
- A big number of speakers have already sent their abstracts
- Mr. Bendkia whom Mr. Bendoouqi has contacted will give the keynote speech in the opening ceremony.

b. Task Distribution

- All that is related to the preparations for the conference has been discussed.
- The conference fees have been set up. They are as follows:

Residents: The following fees include (Board and lodging + participation fees)

Studio for 2 people	1 450 Dhs each
Chalet for 2 people	1 600 Dhs each
Studio for 1 person	1 800 Dhs
Chalet for 4 people	1 200 Dhs each
Studio for 4 people	
Studio for family	Participant 1 450 Dhs Spouse 1 350 Dhs* Each kid 50% discount **
Rooms for trainees CPR and ENS	850 Dhs

*No bags for the partners and no participation fee.

**No bags for kids

Non-residents:

Non-residents	250 Dh. Membership card is not included
MATEBOARD	50% discount

Mr. Fahmi will make and send a list about the tasks of MATEBOARD members during the National Conference. Mr. Bendouqi will go to Casablanca to address different sponsors. He will also choose the conference bag and badge holders. MATE board members will receive an email before the conference. This email will be about their duties during this big event.

6. MATE Bylaws

As everybody knows, MATE lacks internal regulations and does not have a manual of procedures. That is why the current board has been trying to develop mechanisms through which coordination can take place. One achievement worth mentioning is that MATE now has a yahoo group joining local branches with MATEBOARD yahoo group. It is called MATETEAMS. Another achievement which will hopefully see light during the next national conference is the approval of MATE Bylaws that are being drawn up.

7. Financial Report

Mr. Blibil will email the financial report soon.

8. Summer camps

Elected MATE staff, at the national and/or local and regional levels has the mission of facilitating organization, promoting our association, boosting interest of members in MATE activities and

seeing to it that sound projects are presented, discussed in the best democratic manner for the interest of all. One of the successful projects launched by MATE a few years ago is The Summer Camps Project. There is no doubt that it has been of great importance to promote the good image of MATE, but MATE board want to make this project as clear and legal as possible. Therefore the following decisions were made:

- i. MATEBOARD appointed Mr. Fahmi, the National Coordinator of Summer Camps.
- ii. Mr. Fathi and Mr. Bendouqi will be his assistants
- iii. Mr. Hassim and Mr. Fahmi should keep working on the guidelines related to summer camps they started a few months ago.
- iv. The national coordinator with his assistants as well as Mr. Hassim and Mr. Bendouqi will finalize these guidelines before they are submitted to the national board for ratification.

9. Miscellanies:

- i. Mr. Blibil will email the list of the participants in the first Middle School Seminar.
- ii. Mr. Bendouqi will find out as much information as possible about the National Conference site Bouznika. He will forward this information to Mr. Hassim to be uploaded on MATE website.
- iii. Mr. Fathi will study the evaluation sheets of the first Middle School Seminar and write a report about them.
- iv. Mr. Hamouti is kindly requested to write and send a report about Casablanca MATE Day.
- v. Mrs. Sehli is kindly requested to send the names and addresses of the teachers who paid their membership cards during Casablanca MATE Day.
- vi. National and regional boards' members are kindly requested to bring the membership cards books with them to the conference.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Hassim thanked all members of the board for the efforts they have invested in the events held so far to make them a success. He also urged them to keep up the hard work to turn the next National conference into one of the best ever.

Next Meeting: 2nd April, 2007 at 9:00 a.m.

Venue: Bouznika; Conference Site

*Reported by: E. Fahmi
MATE Secretary General*

MATE Larache Regional Branch Creation Report: Thursday January 18th, 2007

Reported by Mustapha, Laarache MATE branch, Secretary General

On Thursday the 18th 2007, teachers in Larache Delegation worked very hard and gathered to create a regional branch for MATE. The event took place in Ahmed Rachidi High School, Ksar el Kebir city and continued in Al Mohamadiya High School. There were 47 attendees.

Reasons for creating the branch

- To contribute to the support and promotion of MATE.
- To introduce MATE to teachers in Larache, especially novice teachers.
- To unite teachers in Larache Delegation.

- To make teachers aware of the different activities that MATE organises throughout the year.
- To encourage contact among teachers in Larache Delegation on the one hand, and between these teachers and teachers of English in other regions of Morocco on the other hand.
- To contribute to and improve the situation of the teaching of English as a foreign language in the region.

The program

- Opening, Abdeslam Jaanine, ELT supervisor, Laarache
- Competency-based Lesson Planning, Abdenbi Badri

- Demo lesson, Abdenbi Badri
- Creation of MATE Regional Branch
- Textbooks and Competency-based Language Teaching, Omar Merzouki, ELT supervisor, Kenitra and Mohammed Abdelali, ELT supervisor Rachidia delegation

As you can see in the above program, the Thursday event witnessed different activities in addition to the creation of the local board.

The opening ceremony

We started the opening by Mr Jaanine's speech. He welcomed MATE Guests: Omar Marzouki, Mohamed Abdelali and Senhaji Rachida. Then he introduced the program. He also talked about MATE recognised status in Morocco.

Lbadri's presentation and demo lesson

After Si Jaanine's speech, Mr Lbadri delivered a presentation on "Competency-based lesson planning" followed by a demo lesson. We had a short break; then we discussed Lbadri's demo lesson.

Creation of MATE Regional Branch

Mr Jaanine delivered another speech in which he talked about the great effort of MATE national board throughout the years. He gave the floor to Mr Omar Marzouki who started by giving a quiz to the attendees about MATE. The objective of the quiz was to see to what extent the attendees are familiar with MATE. After the quiz, Ms Senhaji, Mr Marzouki and myself started presenting MATE membership cards to teachers who would like to get membership. Five teachers were already members. Most teachers were very interested so there were 33

new subscribed members. In what follows, I will give some information about the new MATE members:

After membership subscription, Marzouki administered the board election. Seventeen teachers would like to serve as board members and so they registered their names for election. Out of the seventeen teachers eleven were elected. The final election result come out with the following board members:

The new local board members

Loutfi Mohamed: Secretary General
 Walaf Mustapha: Vice president
 Chaibi Rachid: treasurer
 Echcherki Fouad: deputy secretary general
 Mostafa Ghailan: General Council
 Abdenbe El Badri: General Council
 Chendad Mohamed: General Council
 Mohamed Sebraoui: General Council
 Mustapha El Joubari: General Council
 Fatima Belal: General Council
 Amina Harouch: High school teacher

We ended up the seminar by Abdel Ali's presentation and workshop on Textbook evaluation.

We look forward to promoting EFL teaching situation in Larache delegation and the region. We also look forward to working very hard with all our colleagues in the local board as well as the national board.

Beni Mellal MATE Day, February 17th, 2007

Reported by: Said Elmouhtarim

Beni-Mellal MATE Regional Branch, in collaboration with the regional academy, BeniMellal delegation and the coordinating inspector, organized a MATE day in the academy on February 17th, 2007.

This study day was inaugurated with welcoming words from the representative of the academy. Then the delegué of Beni Mellal gave a brief speech in which he thanked MATE and Beni-Mellal local branch for the great work they do in the field of education. The president of Beni-Mellal local branch also gave a speech in which he welcomed the audience and the guest speakers.

In this study day, which was chaired by Said Elmouhtarim a representative of MATE national board, there were one presentation and two workshops.

The presentation was given by Mr Mohamed Hammani, a teacher supervisor in Casablanca. In this presentation, he dealt with many important issues related to the two new textbooks

programmed for the 1st year baccalaureate: **Ticket to English and Gateway to English.**

After this presentation and the discussion session, there were two workshops. The first one was presented by Fatiha Ouddani, a junior high school teacher in Souk Sebt. In this workshop, the speaker showed the audience different techniques to teach grammar interactively, namely the use of chants, scenarios, games and drama.

The second workshop was presented by Hisham Idahmad, a junior high school teacher in Beni-Mellal. In this workshop the presenter dealt with some difficulties most junior high school teachers face while teaching with the textbook: Focus. Then he gave some suggestions to overcome these difficulties.

The audience, more than 60 teachers from Azilal and Beni-Mellal delegations, was very satisfied with this event which was very successful both at the level of organization, scientific value and social contact.

The Ecole Normale Supérieure – ENS, Rabat - and the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English -MATE- jointly organized their annual study day at the ENS on Friday, March 2nd, 2007. ELT professionals as well as teacher trainees were invited to attend and participate in the pedagogical event. The morning session of the study day was devoted to the current and important issue of citizenship and human rights education in the Moroccan ELT classroom. The afternoon session focused on an equally vital educational issue: supervision and teacher development.

The ENS-MATE event, which has become a well established tradition, is usually held just before the beginning of the teacher trainees' Practicum. Highly competent ELT professionals are invited to present papers and conduct workshops related to major educational issues.

The aim behind organizing such an event is

- first, to provide the Rabat and area ELT professionals with the opportunity to meet in order to exchange and share ideas related to their profession and fields of interest.
- Second, to enable the ENS teacher trainees to attend and participate in an event in which various educational and pedagogical questions would be raised and debated. The ENS English department usually involves the trainees in the organization of the study day by assigning them tasks and by making them feel responsible for taking care of 'guests' and also responsible for the success of 'their' event. The English dept. teacher trainers consider that this is part of teacher training as trainees would learn about the importance of organizing educational events and how to organize these.
- Third, to Give our trainees as well as the host teachers who are going to supervise them during the practicum a chance to meet and break the ice before practice teaching.

The 2007 ENS-MATE study day consisted of various presentations and workshops in which current and important ELT issues were raised and debated – see program below, please.

At the beginning of the morning session, Mrs. Nejjar, the head of the department, warmly welcomed and thanked the audience as well as the guest speakers who have generously accepted to participate in the study day in spite of tight schedules. Sincere thanks were also addressed to the director of the B.C., Mr. Ladbury, who has been very supportive and helpful by collaborating with the ENS department and by attending the morning session.

Mrs. Kerkech, on the other hand, talked about MATE and its important role as an educational institution. Citizenship

being one of the major themes addressed in the study day, Mrs. Kerkech drew attention to the fact that MATE is perfectly playing its role of the 'good citizen' by deploying huge efforts and by investing time, energy and money to support ELT professionals and by providing them with valuable opportunities to develop personally and professionally. The effect on their students would be more than ordinary. Support teachers and you'll be rendering students a wonderful service.

1. The first paper in the morning session was about "Citizenship for Language Education: From Theoretical to Practical Considerations" presented by Mr. A. ZAKI from I.A.V. Rabat. As expected, Mr. Zaki's presentation was not only conducive to deep thinking and reflection but was also very challenging in the sense that well established beliefs, ideas and attitudes related to the concept of citizenship, cultural, social and political awareness were reconsidered.

Abstract of the papers:

1. "Citizenship is an everyday practice with social, cultural, political and economic extensions. It is also about awareness and standing for one's choices and preferences; explaining them and modelling them. For the language teacher, integrating citizenship in the classroom means finding ways to make of these extensions and of these choices fundamental articulations of the class. The presentation will identify a set of issues related to aspects of citizenship of utmost urgency for Morocco and will open up to possible classroom practices to enhance them in the learners."

2. The second paper: « Civic engagement through 'Project Citizen' » was presented by Mr. Imad Larbi, teacher trainer at the Casablanca CPR. Mr. Imad, in a very structured and practical way, tried to draw attention through theoretical as well as concrete examples to the importance not only of making students aware of the importance of being 'good' citizens but also of the fact that citizenship is a matter of real and daily practice. Examples were given about real situations and achievements. Mr. Imad who is also the director of the *Moroccan Center for civic Education*, an independent NGO, explained the aims and the good job the organization is doing through projects to promote citizenship awareness and practice among young students.

3. The third and fourth presentations were presented by Mrs. Belkachla and Mr. Laklida from the CPR Marrakech. The topic was "Civic and Human Rights Education in the Moroccan ELT classroom". Both speakers are currently working on a very interesting MATE educational project: the elaboration of a manual about activities and tasks related to civic education. The speakers talked about the rationale behind their idea, about the objectives, the methodology, the advantages as well as obstacles, etc. Mr. Laklida and Mrs. Belkachla's participation in the Rabat study day came as a follow up to the 1st MATE national conference on Citizenship Education, they co-organized and participated in. the conference was held in Marrakech in December

2006. The idea was to cascade the experience and share ideas with colleagues.

4. The last presentation was entitled “Human Rights and the UN”. Ms. Stephanie COLE, who is an American ELF currently working at the ENS department of English, focused on the important issue of Human Rights. What are the rights which are being violated around the world? who are the victims? Why? What can be done? Can education help? In a very practical and entertaining way, Ms. Cole presented ways in which students’ awareness can be raised. The educator’s role is to inculcate values and respect for human dignity and rights in young students who are future world citizens.

5. The afternoon session began by a paper/workshop entitled “Supervision and Teacher Development”. The speaker, Mr. Chaddoudi, an ELT supervisor, focused on the beneficial effects on teachers of collaborative supervision. The role of the supervisor is not to judge and criticize but to support, guide and encourage. Practical examples and ways to go about supervising teachers were presented and discussed. Mr. Chaddoudi in a successful combination of theory and practice presented situations and cases to make the audience realize the positive effect a constructive and humanistic supervision can have on teachers who are supervised.

6. The second activity was a workshop jointly conducted by Mr. Michael Little and Bernard McGuigan from the British Council. The workshop’s objective was to present “Formulas for Reflective Practice in Observation”. In a very effective and collaborative way, Mr. Michael Little and Bernard McGuigan involved all of the teacher trainees, trainers and the host teachers in the process of reflecting on the various attitudes supervisors, teachers and trainees can consciously or unconsciously adopt when they are supervising and observing or being observed. The session was very interactive, which gave both trainees and trainers or host teachers an opportunity to learn about each other’s

roles and about the best possible way to observe and supervise for more effectiveness.

On behalf of the ENS English department and MATE, we would like to warmly thank our guest speakers: Mr. Zaki, Mr. Imad, Mrs. Belkachla, Mr. Laklida, Ms. Cole, Mr. Chaddoudi, Mr. Little and Mr. McGuigan for having taken the trouble to come all the way from other cities or to come back to Rabat in order to participate and share their ideas with teachers and students.

We also sincerely thank the director of the ENS-Rabat for his valuable support and generosity. We thank him for having invited the guest speakers and the dept. faculty to lunch on Friday, for offering tea and cookies during the breaks, and for providing facilities for Xeroxing. We extend our thanks to the institution’s administrative staff.

We would like to thank MATE president, Mr Hassim for making us a nice surprise visit and for attending the morning session. Good luck with the preparations for the next MATE national conference.

Warm thanks are extended to the BC director, Mr. Ladbury, who has been very supportive in his collaboration with the department and who has found a way to attend the morning session in spite of his numerous obligations.

We are also grateful to our dept. colleagues: Mrs. Nejjar, Mrs. Kerkech, Mrs. Mouhdi, Ms. Cole, Mr. Monadi, Mrs. Boulima who have deployed huge efforts to make of the study day a successful one. We also thank our trainees who have been efficient and helpful.

Our thanks are extended to all colleagues and friends who have attended and participated in the event and who enriched the debate by their valuable comments.

Going Modular in Moroccan Higher Education: An Evaluation

Lahsen Benaziza, Ibn Zohr University

When, with resounding hue and cry, the Reform was implemented in Moroccan Higher Education three years ago, it was meant to replace the rigid and now obsolete system of education by the more flexible modular one. In theory at least, this was meant to be a shift from a wasteful prescriptive approach to learning to a more constructivist one that fosters independent thinking and innovation and prepares learners for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The flexibility built into the modular system was supposed to usher in a new philosophy of education involving students in their education, making them responsible in determining the competencies and the outcomes they seek to accomplish.

With the challenging and at times even perplexing modular system that is not quite broken in yet, many teachers and students alike are nostalgic for the old system and its complacencies. Those who are hankering for the old system miss the so-called certainty and smoothness of a system that was in their eyes trouble-free and headache-free dictated

from above by an almost transcendental authority that knew best what is good for us all. In those days, the professor taught a set of eternally prescribed courses to a generally faceless crowd of students, and the spoon-fed students learned prescribed ‘knowledge’ and regurgitated it once a year, a year sanctioned by one exam, that is, one shot in the dark, a hit or miss affair that has over the last decades left numberless casualties strewn alongside the academic path. Though this is not the appropriate time to enumerate the inadequacies and the insufficiencies of the old system, suffice it to mention that according to official statistics, it took a student eight years on average to complete a four-year degree. This now defunct system with its so-called comforting certainties, unquestioned strictures and generally devastating results reminds one of the famous opening lines of T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land* that read as follows:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

I by no means want to turn this paper into a poetry lesson, but let's just say that the change brought about by the modular system is stirring us into a cruelly rude awakening from the falsely comforting old system that has over the years "kept us warm in evasive self-complacency and impervious forgetfulness.

Despite the failure of the old system, the modular system has not so far gathered enough support and enthusiasm on the part of educators and learners. If this lack of enthusiasm and support is due mainly to the abruptness with which modularization has been implemented, to the lack of preparedness, and in general the lack of material and human resources, it is also because there is not enough understanding among teachers, let alone students, of the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of the modular system. The shift from the old system to the new one is a shift in educational paradigms. Though we are all now familiar with the technicalities of this educational system, though we all know how it works; only few have a profound and thorough understanding of its principles and of the rationale behind it. The mechanics of modularization have been battered ad nauseam, but the philosophy has been largely neglected.

Time does not permit a detailed and thorough exposition of the philosophical principles and orientations of the modular system, but a quick review of some of these principles is necessary:

1. The main characteristic of this system is openness and flexibility. We all recall the time when curriculum was engraved in stone, as it were, and we also recall the frustrations we used to experience at our inability to change one course by another when such a course could no longer fulfil the purpose originally assigned to it or simply when it exhausted its usefulness. The flexibility built in the modular system not only allows the replacement of one module by another, but also whole degree tailoring, and hence a more efficient targeting of objectives that meets the needs of students as well as those of an increasingly demanding job market. This latitude in curriculum design is meant to guarantee efficiency, ensure quality in education, and develop students' sense of responsibility.
2. Another positive aspect of modularization is Module accumulation and capitalization. Gone is the time when students would fail by droves and repeat the whole year, including the courses for which they obtained good grades, simply because they didn't have the required general average. The old failure-orientated system is now superseded by a success-orientated system since students now accumulate and capitalize the modules they validate. For Moroccan students, this asset represents a better rationalization of academic achievement and a better return on investments. Module accumulation and capitalization also facilitates, among other things, inter-departmental and even inter-institutional portability and transfer. In other words, this allows a greater recognition of learning previously

attained by students and therefore a greater horizontal and vertical mobility.

3. Module accumulation and capitalization (called elsewhere Credit Accumulation and Capitalization) gives students a choice that was unheard of in the old system. Because every module validated is a module definitively earned, students can choose the pace, the place, and the length of their studies. Capitalization, as I have said, facilitates mobility from one department to another or from one institution to another. It also allows students to register as part-time students and go at their own pace according to their own abilities, and academic and personal circumstances. This student-centered system enhances the value of personal and professional development through continuing or part-time education without diminishing academic rigor. In this respect, we all remember the time when we had to succumb to entreaties of students unable to attend for professional reasons. In such cases, we had to respond with a categorical nyet to their entreaties, or show inappropriate compassion at the expense of academic rigor. In the modular scheme, such students register as part-timers and take only as many modules as they can handle. In other words, they study at their own expense, not at the expense of academic requirements.
4. The choice afforded to students through the modular scheme increases their involvement in their own education and their motivation. By having some latitude in tailoring their own programmes, they are made responsible for their own education. This is no libertarian approach to education since there are always rules to be respected, requirements and prerequisites to be fulfilled. In universities that have entirely broken in the modular system, a whole programme can be scrapped if it has exhausted its usefulness to be replaced by a new programme that meets best students' needs and demands and those of the job market.
5. The backbone of the modular system is permanent assessment. The least we can say about permanent assessment is that through immediate reward it increases motivation and efficiency and enhances performance. Permanent assessment comes as a remedy to the ills of the old system with the unfairness of its hit-or-miss strike and its Russian roulette aspect. In that system in which a student's work was evaluated only at the end-of-year exam, you were a goner, as Humphrey Bogart would put it, with no possibility of reprieve, if you were unlucky enough to have insomnia the night before the fatidic exam, or if you had a nervous breakdown during that exam week. Whereas, if you were an expert at cheating you passed the exam with flying colours even if you were a loafer all year around. Permanent assessment enables educators to better know their students, better monitor their progress, and better evaluate their individual performance.

How much of this, if any at all, has been accomplished through the modular system as it has been implemented in our local department of English, which is to some extent microcosmic of the larger national educational macrocosm. Without much ado, I can simply say without prevarication, "very little, if any at all". Nonetheless, I do not want to launch an indictment of the implementation of the reform in our department; it is too easy, given the bleakness of our situation. Suffice it to state the following damning facts:

- there are more than 16000 registered students at our Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, while the holding capacity of the faculty does not exceed 4000. More than 4000 students are admitted in the English Department alone, which is a lot less than the number of students admitted in the whole Faculty of Letters of Mohammedia and other cities in the country. With a faculty of 26 professors, we have a ratio of one professor per more than 150 students. With this exceedingly large student population, no system will work, be it modular or non-modular;
- the administrative staff is not large enough and has not had the necessary training to handle the modular system with all its new technicalities;
- professors are overwhelmed not only by the sheer number of students, but the added administrative work flung at them in the absence of a well-trained administrative staff.

I could go on and on enumerating the so many aspects of general structural unpreparedness, which is giving a bad name to a system that has otherwise proven its worth elsewhere, but I'd rather be positive and suggest what should be done to rescue this system from a failure it does not deserve.

I will not insist on what is self-evident, which is the need to unclog the Faculty of Letters and Ibn Zohr University in general, by the immediate creation of other institutions in the city and/or in this forsaken part of the country. To meet the challenges posed by the large student population, a more energetic faculty and administrative staff hiring policy is needed. A stricter student admission policy has to be reinforced to at least keep away unmotivated students who register at our institution only for lack of something else to do. These recriminations are incessantly voiced by my disgruntled colleagues, who are disheartened by the slow response of the government.

What I intend to do in this last section of my paper is to humbly suggest a few solutions within the limitations imposed by the structural insufficiencies aforementioned. Although we cannot turn back the clock and start all over again, the modular system should not have been implemented abruptly, all at once, but rather in a gradual, incremental fashion. Even in Europe and elsewhere, where universities have a better level of preparedness, both material and human, the modular system can in some cases cohabit with the old system. In other words, while some programmes are modularized, others are not. Besides, from the experience of other countries, one realizes that there isn't one single way of going modular; that is, while some study programmes are modularized, other programmes are not. In some of these universities, modularity is sector-specific targeting a special type of education such as vocational training. The astounding wholesale fashion in which modularity has been implemented in Morocco is, to put it moderately, quite foolhardy.

Furthermore, it is mind-boggling that our modular system, though in essence a credit system since it relies on accumulation and capitalization, has not introduced the actual and explicit use of credits. The allocation of credits to modules adds flexibility to the educational process, increases students' involvement in and responsibility for their education, and facilitates academic recognition and transfer

nationally and internationally. In this respect, the adoption of a credit-based system would allow us to align our higher education on European higher education, which adopted in 1989 the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), itself inspired by the age-old American Credit system.

The 3-unit module, more suitable to, say, a Chemistry Department, in which a module generally consists of a theoretical component, a practical one, and lab time, is quite uncalled for in an English Department. The management of 3-unit modules has been a true nightmare. Given the difficult circumstances we are experiencing, we would reduce our hardships by replacing the present 3-unit modules by 1-unit modules, whereby one module would be equal to one course. This would relieve faculty as well as administration of the headaches involved in units' interdependency, in time-consuming and most often useless coordination meetings, and in the difficult balancing act when grades allotted to individual units by 3 different professors are polarized, etc.

Last but not least, the infamous *session de rattrapage*, that we shall call the remedial exam or the makeup exam for want of a better term, has to be discarded, entirely scrapped from the system. If the ultimate pedagogical purpose of an assessment is to monitor students' progress, ensure their improvement, and measure their achievements, the *session de rattrapage* accomplishes none of this. To begin with, students have no time to improve since this so-called remedial exam is generally scheduled within a week or two from the first exam session, and since students are no longer in contact with their professors in the period separating the two exams. The aberration resulting from such an absurd configuration is that the whole department comes to an entropic standstill during this period. Indeed by the time the first and the second sessions are over, two months have elapsed, two months during which professors are caught up in a web of irritating technicalities and are involved in everything except teaching. After this uncalled-for halt, the second semester begins in mid-March or April to end in July, leaving professors with no time for research, and thus turning the university into some glorious high school. Since we have chosen a semester-based education, we should do it right like everybody else in the rest of the world; that is, the first semester should begin in September and end in December, and the second semester should begin in January and end in April. For example, in the North American system, a third semester runs from May to July and is meant for students who want to complete their degrees at a quicker pace or for those who have to take again courses failed in the Winter and Spring semesters. Professors who choose to teach Summer school are paid a supplementary salary.

To get back to the main question, I will say most emphatically that the purpose of permanent assessment has been misinterpreted. The so-called *rattrapage* is built into permanent assessment; it is part and parcel of it. In a composition course, for example, whenever a student writes an essay on which he is graded, he or she is given the chance to improve his or her grade by rewriting it, following the professor's guidance and recommendations. The same thing goes for all written assignments students have to do in a given semester. True! It has not been easy to implement permanent assessment with large-sized classes, but we should not relinquish this type of student evaluation, which is the essence of the Reform. Under the present circumstances, even one or two essays graded twice in the manner I have explained are more beneficial to students, more efficient, and

more cost-effective than the present end-of-term hit or miss exams. This of course does not imply that exams should be banned altogether. There should still be one final exam without a *session de rattrapage*, but it should not carry the evaluative weight assigned to it now.

To conclude, let me just say that there is most likely no going back to the old system and that the modular one is here to stay, but we should not turn its flexibility into a new rigidity, and this, by adjusting it to our needs and our circumstances.

Reflections on the New Reform: The Mini-monograph in the Department of English Studies in El Jadida¹

By Reddad Erguig, Chouaib Doukkali University, El Jadida

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide an evaluation of the implementation of the New Educational Reform with an emphasis on the experience of the 'mini-monograph' or the 'Rapport de fin d'études' in the English Studies Programme in El Jadida. The main contention is that the mission of such a programme has not been thoroughly accomplished; that is, the mission of providing students with an adequate training as well as the necessary skills to write an extended paper has not been a complete success.

0. Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the on-going debate on the New Reform in Higher Education in Morocco. It aims to discuss the issue of the mini-monograph that students in the department of English have to write as part of the requirements they have to satisfy in order to get their 'maitrise' degree with a special focus on the Department of English Studies in El Jadida. The importance of addressing such a question consists in the fact that it is related to two broad but interrelated questions. The first relates to whether or not we have accomplished our mission as university teachers within the New Reform and the second is whether or not the English Studies Programme in El Jadida has been a success. This paper is by no means an attempt to evaluate the New Reform or the English Studies programme in its totality, however. Such a task is beyond the scope of the present paper.

To evaluate the degree of success of the New Reform and the English Studies programme, several criteria could be used among which we will choose three. The first consists in whether students have developed accuracy and fluency in the use of English in both speaking and writing. The second relates to whether students have mastered the art of translation and acquired the necessary communication skills as two main explicitly stated objectives of the programme in question. The third is whether students have accumulated the necessary qualifications and developed the relevant profile necessary for an easy integration into the job market¹. In the present paper, the first criterion i.e. accuracy in the use of English in speaking and writing is used to appraise the success of the English Studies programme in El Jadida. Particular emphasis is laid on the mini-monograph that students have to write in order to get their degree in English.

In fact, in most universities students have to complete one or several monographs and/or theses in order to fulfil the requirements of the degree they study for. A research paper is usually a report on the results that students have obtained through their investigation on a selected topic. As a unique creation of the student, a paper is based on his/her thoughts and the facts and ideas s/he has gathered from a variety of sources, be they written, oral, visual or auditory. It is a means through which students demonstrate the skills they have developed and the knowledge they have accumulated over the years they have spent studying at a higher education institution.

This paper is made up of five sections. The aim of the first is to compare the old and new systems of Higher Education in terms of the nature and quality of the monograph students are required to write. The second section is concerned with a detailed discussion of the process and quality of the "mini-monograph" that students have to write within the New Reform and some of the problems that both the supervisor and supervisees face. The object of the third section is to discuss what may be called the 'classical' explanations of students' poor performance; whereas section four suggests alternative explanations for students' poor achievement so far as the 'mini-monograph' is concerned. The concern of the last section is to make recommendations for both teachers and the people in charge both at the regional and national levels with the aim of improving students' educational attainment and the quality of education and training that the university offers.

1. The Old and New Systems Compared

A brief comparison of the old and new systems of Higher Education in Morocco indicates that there has been a substantial change so far as the end-of-studies monograph is concerned. In the old system, students had to spend almost an academic year writing a monograph. Usually, they used to be provided with the reading material relevant to their monographs a few months before the beginning of the academic year; that is in July. Also, the monographs which students had to write were about 50 pages long. My personal experiences as well as discussions with my distinguished ex-teachers and current respectful colleagues show that the process of writing the monograph was undoubtedly a daunting task for both teachers and students. Although students used to devote all their time and energy to the completion of the research paper at the expense of the other written- and oral-exam courses, the quality of their papers was generally no more than mediocre. Students had difficulties locating and using the relevant sources, collecting, describing and analysing their data and writing the different chapters of their papers.

Within the New Reform, however, students from the Department of English Studies in El Jadida start writing their research papers only in the second semester of the academic year; that is, in February or March. Unlike in the old system, students now have only about four months rather than a whole academic year to write a paper which is only about 15 pages long. Still, students find such a task an ordeal as attested by my experience and the personal communication of my colleagues as will be discussed below.

2. An Account of the Current Experience of the 'Mini-Monograph'

Within the New Reform, and in general terms, quite many students who are involved in the process of writing the research paper fail to show up for the meetings with their supervisors on a regular basis². The students' usual, boring, unacceptable and predictable excuse is that they 'have personal problems.'

¹ See the document presented by the Department of English Studies in El Jadida to the Ministry of Higher Education for accreditation.

² Because the claims made in this paper are based on my personal reflection as a teacher rather than on data that were rigorously collected, allow me to overuse and abuse the quantifier 'quite many.'

When students start writing their research papers, quite many of them demonstrate that they fail to engage in the kind of brainstorming and narrowing down of the topic expected of students who have studied at a post-secondary institution for about three years. Quite many of them fail to express the purpose of their papers, both orally and in writing. They can neither write a few sentences to discuss the thesis statement and research questions of their papers nor talk in English about them. Even worse, some students ask their supervisor for permission to speak in Arabic.

Once students have selected a topic and started writing the different sections that make up their papers, quite many of them fail to write coherent and cohesive paragraphs. In my humble opinion, this is not to be related to the fact that students have not studied composition or have not been exposed to the skills of writing. Rather, it should be attributed to students' lack of motivation and zeal for learning and knowledge as well as to some teachers' leniency with students in terms of the course requirements and the inflated grades they assign students.

Quite many students equally show that they do not know how to consult different sources, take notes and incorporate those notes into their text. Again, this should by no means be related to the New Reform itself nor to the fact that students have not previously been exposed to study skills and strategies. Students are exposed to the study habits and strategies that are most relevant to their academic needs in the "Study Skills" course which is spread over two Semesters. One wonders here about the utility of a course such as "Study Skills" if students do not even know how to take notes and use them in their papers. A set of questions are legitimate in this respect: the content of a course such as "Study Skills", the way it is taught and evaluated, the benefit students draw from the course and their attitudes toward it. These questions are beyond the scope of the present paper, however.

What is more, our students do not seem to make effective research-related uses of the Internet. When they do use the Internet, they either plagiarise whole sections or take information from websites and inaccurately cite the reference (usually citing just the search engine rather than the exact URL and the date of retrieval of the document)³.

In the course of completing their papers, quite many students fail to submit sections from their papers well-typed and/or proofread. Of course, it is not mandatory for our students to type their work from the very beginning of the semester. However, the general tendency is that the work that students submit requires proofreading and revision. Again, the cause is not that students have not been trained in the practice of revising their writing through the use of a checklist. Even if we claim that teachers, for one reason or another, did not give their students the opportunity to develop such a skill, it is my firm belief that students ought to make personal efforts to develop that skill; the Internet, though not accessible to every student, could prove to be a useful tool in this respect. There are many websites that students could use in order to learn how to edit and revise their papers in accordance with the academic writing conventions.

The assessment of the experience of supervising students' mini-monographs also suggests that students, by and large, fail to make good use of their teachers' comments and feedback. The process of pointing out students' mistakes and making

³ Of course, I will not delve into the disgraceful question of plagiarism because it has become so widespread a practice that a separate paper has to be devoted to the discussion of its forms, causes and repercussions.

comments about their work turns into a 'ping-pong game,' as one of my distinguished ex-teachers used to describe it. Students simply return to their supervisors almost the same work, usually after introducing some very superficial changes.

Finally, students view the completion of the mini-monograph as an exclusively individual performance and tend to underestimate the importance of group work. The supervisees' work shows that they almost never exchange their work with their classmates and thus fail to benefit from the comments and the criticism they could provide them. There is almost a total absence of the culture of group work despite the emphasis put on this aspect in a course such as Study Skills.

The final product, the completed paper, of quite many students shows another lack of the necessary typing and formatting computer skills. This raises the question of the relevance and utility of the "Computer Skills" course. As the profile of our students demonstrates, they have studied computer skills and one of the questions that could be addressed in another paper is how students can fail to type their texts and correctly format them despite the courses they have taken in this regard.

In short, the completed paper that quite many a student submits to the faculty for assessment demonstrates that the mission of developing students' 'competency' or 'standard' in the area of conducting research and reporting the findings in a mini-monograph has not been thoroughly successful. It seems that students have managed to develop neither the 'content standards' nor the 'performance standards' that are targeted. The mini-monograph submitted to the faculty for evaluation does not show that the student has acquired knowledge of what makes a good research paper: the different sections that should make up a research paper, the function and utility of each section, an appropriate style of citing references, etc. Besides, such a mini-monograph does not show that students have developed the adequate 'performance standards'; that is, students' mini-monographs do not show that real progress has been made nor do they show that students have really acquired the necessary skills so that they can be relatively autonomous when doing research in their subsequent academic life.

3. Classical Explanations of the Students' Poor Performance

After this brief description, I would like now to provide some explanations for the poor quality of the "mini-monograph" students write and make some recommendations for teachers as well as for the local and national decision-makers. Several parties may be blamed for the problems that are manifest in students' mini-monographs. Many students, parents and even teachers blame the New System for the fact that the papers students produce are mediocre. Time constraints, large groups and lack of the infrastructure and human resources are usually advanced as reasons for students' failure to develop the necessary skills to write decent research papers⁴.

The administration is equally blamed for the predominantly low performance of students. It is usually suggested that the administration should provide more teachers, computer rooms, financial assistance to students and a rich and high quality library in order to ensure a good and useful training to students. Teachers are also blamed in the sense that the students' poor academic performance is attributed to the teacher-centred

⁴ It is worth pointing out that although the New Reform can be criticised on several grounds and in so many respects, it has nonetheless provided teachers with the framework needed to offer students a better training. There are now new courses that target important skills and a new system of assessment. What is needed, though, is a more positive attitude towards the role of the university among all the parties concerned i.e. students, teachers, local and national decision-makers in order to make the reform of Higher Education a successful experience.

teaching methodologies adopted in class. The overuse of lecturing and infrequent involvement of students often lead to the students' loss of motivation for learning. What is more, the choice of the content to be taught in class is at times inadequate and irrelevant to students' interests and their academic and employability needs; thus, they become bored and demotivated and give up attending class.

4. Alternative Explanations

Although the validity and strength of the aforementioned explanations cannot be denied, the thrust of the argument in this paper is that students' predominantly low performance, particularly in the mini-monograph, is to be attributed to four major factors.

4.1. Culture

It is my firm belief that the explanation of students' poor academic performance particularly in the mini-monograph is grounded in our dominant cultural attitudes. It is commonly recognised in Moroccan culture that success as the outcome of hard work is no longer maintained as a positive value. I might be criticised for making a sweeping generalisation about the Moroccan culture, but it is my contention that our students bring to university attitudes, beliefs and convictions among which labouring for the sake of learning is missing. Even those industrious students who should be envied for their hard work are now looked down upon by their peers and viewed as bookish or 'qaraya'⁵.

4.2. Teachers' Leniency and Grade Inflation

Many university teachers, in my view, are to blame for students' widely recognised low academic attainment. It is a general impression that we are a little too lenient with students in terms of the requirements that we expect them to satisfy. Of course, I am not advocating the fact that we should be tough with our students. On the contrary, out of concern for our students' subsequent academic and professional careers and for high quality learning, we have to offer them a good and useful training while at the same time ensuring that they either satisfy the requirements and pass or repeat the class.

One way of passing only those industrious students is to put an end to the phenomenon of grade inflation that we notice in so many courses. Yes, hardworking students have definitely to be rewarded with the appropriate grade, and no limits should be set to the grade that could be assigned to a student. However, we need to be fair in the sense that only those students who demonstrate that they have acquired the necessary skills obtain a passing grade. How can a student whose paragraph or essay is full of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, spelling and punctuation mistakes and inaccurate vocabulary, for example, get a passing grade in a course such as "Composition"? Failing this student would give him/her the opportunity to learn from his/her mistakes and improve his/her writing skills in the subsequent semesters.

4.3. Understaffing

Within the New Reform, it seems that teachers have lost control over academic matters. The insufficiency of the staff (teachers and secretaries) at the level of each department together with the relatively overwhelming number of students has led to a situation in which teachers are no longer in the know about students who are registered at a particular level and those who attend class and take tests and exams. Teachers are now at a loss dealing with and solving the problems of the large number of 'special-case' students; that is – those students who claim they

have problems that prevent them from handing in an assignment or taking a test or an exam. Given the large and numerous classes within the New Reform, a teacher cannot easily respond to the requests of those students who either miss a test or get a wrong grade.

As a result of all this, the standards are getting lower and lower. A large number of students who reach semester VI fail to demonstrate that they have learnt enough English: quite many of them still grapple with the formulation of a correct sentence, not to speak of a coherent paragraph. One of the big questions to be raised in this respect is the predicament of these students because some of them will soon be teachers of English, a language which they do not master in the first place. Another big question is how students can move to the 'maitrise' cycle without having fulfilled the requirements for the "DEUG" cycle degree.

4.4. Students

In my humble opinion, students have the lion share of the responsibility. It is a general impression among colleagues that students try to use the New Reform to their advantage. Students ill-use the New Reform in the sense that they practise all types of cheating to gain high grades; we need not forget that cheating was a very rare phenomenon in the old system. Also, students who miss the midterm test, for instance, come up with all types of excuses in order to convince a teacher to give them another chance or sometimes simply to assign them a grade gratuitously. Within the New reform, students' main concern is hunting for grades. They are obsessively infatuated with getting high grades regardless of the amount of learning that should take place. A great number of students are no longer patient and motivated enough to develop their four skills and enrich their knowledge in the areas of their speciality. They fail to demonstrate they are autonomous learners. Almost no one shows an interest in doing extra readings or seeking more information about a particular issue that has been raised in class. In "Study Skills", for instance, students were asked if they had ever consulted the Web for more information with respect to the issues debated in class. The surprising answer was why they should do so since they were given enough material to read in class.

4.5. The Administration

The administration is also to blame for the lowering of standards. The people in charge of managing the university affairs are primarily concerned with the fact that the New Reform has to be implemented at any cost. They are more interested in the fact that large numbers of students graduate rather than whether they really satisfy the requirements of the graduation. In other words, the statistics are important from the point of view of the decision makers because they reassure the population and give the impression that the situation is improving within the New Reform.

5. Recommendations

Because of all what has been stated above, and in order to handle the issue of the low quality of students' performance in the mini-monograph, university teachers have to shoulder their responsibility and stop the practice of grade inflation. As teachers, we have to coordinate as much as possible and at all levels in order to pass only those students who demonstrate they have satisfied the requirements in a maximum number of courses. We should not lose track of the fact that the New Reform is very generous; students have the opportunity to improve their performance and make up for the low grades they may obtain in a test or an exam thanks to the adoption of continuous assessment as a method of student evaluation. We have to pass only the 'cream of the crop' and reward students with grades only when they have performed well.

⁵ In Arabic, the word 'qaraya' refers to people who are excessively interested in their studies and in reading. It is now used derogatively by the majority of students and even lay people to refer to those very few students who are diligent and who take their studies seriously.

Second, there is a need for a rigorous entrance exam that is both written and oral in order to admit only those serious students who have the potential to improve their mastery of English. Third, attendance has to be checked and students should be penalised if they are absent more than three or four times so as to leave their seats for the students who are more serious and hardworking. Missing a test or an exam without a sound reason in a particular course should lead to students' failure in that course.

Moreover, students have to be involved in this enterprise as well. It is high time that students reconsidered their attitudes towards higher education in general and the training they pursue in particular. In the absence of external factors that can motivate them to learn, students should find ways of developing intrinsic motivation so that they can make their training successful. In this respect, they should equally develop the habit of working in groups; they have to believe in the idea of group work and in the need that they should be autonomous learners rather than expect their teachers to spoon-feed them. Fourth, students ought to double the efforts in order to draw the maximum from the courses they take. The success of a course such as "Study Skills" or "Computer Skills", for instance or any other course is not dependent solely on the teacher but also on the efforts made by the students.

The people in charge both at the local and national levels have to change their attitudes with respect to the goal of Higher Education and the nature of training that should be offered to students. It is high time that top priority should be given to

providing students with a solid training and a high-quality education rather than issue degree holders with documents that are worthless in the job market.

The major goal of all this is not to defend an elitist view of education but rather to defend the right of all the segments of the population to gain access to a good, useful and relevant training. In a nutshell, it is now time that the famous slogan "Education for all" should be reversed as follows: "Education for all the people who are willing to learn."

6. Conclusion

The object of this paper has revolved around a discussion of the issue of the mini-monograph that students have to write as part of the requirements for the 'maitrise' degree with an emphasis on the Department of English Studies in El Jadida. While some classical explanations for students' poor academic achievement in the mini-monograph cannot be denied, I have argued that such poor attainment is grounded in our cultural attitudes which do not value hard work. Teachers are also to blame for students' low performance mainly because of their leniency with students and their grade inflation. Students have their share of the responsibility because they are excessively concerned with hunting for grades rather than with learning itself. The administration is equally responsible for the lowering of standards because the main concern is not primarily with the provision of high-quality education but rather the implementation of the New Reform regardless of whether some logistics (more teachers, more classrooms, etc) are provided.

The Use of L1 in ELT: a "Conditional Yes" or "an Absolute No"?

Missar Abderrahim, Lycee Sidi Daoud, Ouarzazate

Introduction

Language teaching is a daunting challenge because the target language is the subject as well as the medium of instruction. Hence, communication breakdowns between learners and teachers are highly probable and that is the reason why a high proportion of practitioners resort to L1 in order to redress the situation. Nevertheless, the use of the mother tongue (MT) in the classrooms remains a taboo because very few teachers dare talk about that aspect of their practice. Prodromou (2000: 7) rightly notes that "the mother tongue in the EFL classroom has been a skeleton in the cupboard, the skeleton has been there all the time, we just haven't wanted to talk about it". A further point relates to the feeling of sin and guilt teachers feel when they use L1 in their teaching exercise.

The use of the mother tongue in ELT: a long-standing controversy

The use of the mother tongue in ELT has been a bone of contention among linguists and teachers. As a matter of fact, the issue is highly controversial on which no consensus has been achieved. In order to crystallize the magnitude of this controversy, I have fished out from a teachers' forum three quotations related to the topic in hand:

1. *«I'm sorry but I don't have much patience with the claims that a little of the L1 is good for students because it makes them feel "comfortable." I think that it may be a case of "comfort now, pay later." You can't learn a language by speaking or listening to another language. No one ever has learned a language this way, and no one ever will. So I think that teachers who speak to students in their L1 to make them feel better about the L2 are really misguided. I also think*

that it is a form of sabotage.» Anthea Tillyer/City University of New York (USA)

2. *«I teach English in a secondary school in Italy. My students are elementary level adults and I had to cope with the problems of using L1 when I started school last September. Last school year they had another teacher who mainly spoke only English and didn't translate any words into Italian. When I arrived, they asked me if I could at least explain grammar points or words in Italian instead of English because they had big problems in understanding the target language.»* Professoressa Ornella Spano. Cagliari, Italy.

3. *«Some people seem to assume that the "use of L1 means a sole or a dominant use of L1 for instruction." But I've never advocated that kind of use of L1 nor do I think anyone else in this forum has. I've been consistent in saying that a limited use of L1 for carefully considered pedagogical purposes in homogenous L2 classrooms is appropriate...»* Bill Snyder Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey.

Let's consider a spectrum. At one end, there are those teachers who reject the use of L1 altogether or fail to recognize any significant potential in it. At the other, there are those who massively overuse it themselves or are willing to accept such overuse from learners.

Proponents' Arguments

The advocates of using L1 in ELT advance the forthcoming arguments to back up their position:

1. **It is from the womb of MT that the new languages are born in the student's mind. So to exclude MT from the English classroom is like trying to wean a baby on day one of their life.**

2. "L1 provides a sense of security for students allowing them to express themselves. The learner is willing to take risks with English." Auerbach (1993:19)

3. It is more important for students to understand a concept than to remain ignorant of what is going on in the classroom.

4. Denying the use of L1 denies the students access to an important tool: other students.

5. A more humanistic approach is needed that values the students, their culture and their language. Cummins and Swain (1986) rightly note that acceptance of the home language is essential in creating an environment conducive to learning, where feelings of self-worth and confidence are fostered.

6. L1 can prevent time being wasted on tortuous explanations and instructions.

Opponents' Arguments:

On the other side of the fence, there arises a staunch opposition of teachers and educationalists who have a myriad of arguments up their sleeves; all of the following arguments point out to the limitations and the pitfalls of using L1 in language classrooms:

1. Students will become dependent on L1; they will develop a kind of addiction to using their mother tongue and they will not even have a go at the target language.

2. The use of L1 in ELT is reminiscent of the Grammar Translation method which proved to be inefficient in fostering communicative skills.

3. There are many situations in which the teacher simply does not speak or even understand the students' language, yet they manage effective interaction and communication with their students.

4. In EFL contexts, the classroom provides the unique opportunity for learners to get in touch with the target language. Using L1 is tantamount to depriving him of that sole opportunity. Atkinson (1993: 12) agrees with the need to maximize L2 usage, and he states that "every second spent using the L1 is a second not spent using English—and every second counts."

5. Teachers can have recourse to visual aids, mime, gestures, and examples as well as rephrasing of explanations instead of using L1.

Some Guidelines for L1 Use in the Classroom

It is important to note that even the keen supporters of the mother tongue as being a viable tool in ELT caution teachers against using it haphazardly. In view of this warning, some guidelines have been drawn up to gear the use of L1 in language classrooms towards purposeful ends. Therefore, practitioners should take the following tips into

consideration if they choose to use the students' mother tongue:

a. Classroom management: The objective is purely non-instructional. Since the aim is to establish a code of conduct, L1 could be efficient in this respect.

b. Maintaining discipline: if a fight or some other serious problem breaks out, are you really going to insist on an English-only policy when dealing with it?

c. Contact with students: when delicacy and empathy are required, L1 is better.

d. Discussion of cross-cultural issues: The use of MT is judicious to discuss specific linguistic points such as connotation, collocation, idiomatic usages, culture-specific lexis, politeness formulae, sociocultural norms, the use of intonation, gestures, etc.

e. Instructions or prompts: especially at lower levels, both time efficiency and learner confidence can be greatly assisted by the use of L1, with L2 being introduced gradually.

f. Explanation of errors: when these are caused by L1 transfer, it surely makes sense to go back to L1 and then consider what went wrong and why.

g. Presentation of grammar and language rules: metalanguage is frequently a lot more complex than what it's being used to describe and L1 can smooth the path and avoid unnecessary terminology in L2.

h. To clarify word meanings and concepts: L1 can be used as a last resort to check the understanding of confusing words and concepts

i- Needs assessment: Students are allowed to use their mother tongue to pinpoint their needs.

Conclusion

It's needful to reflect on the use of the mother tongue in our classrooms not just for convenience but as a vital resource for our learners. The use of the mother tongue in ELT should not be whimsical or random. It should be carefully considered according to the students' level, their previous experience and the objective in view. Hence, a principled approach to MT use in the classroom is needed and this is where initial training courses can help out.

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Testing 1060 Students! Is it possible? If yes, would it be credible?

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General thesis

Any evaluation of the new educational reform would lack objectivity if it does not take into account the adverse conditions in which it is being implemented.

General objective

This presentation aims at demonstrating the following equation: The conditions under which formal tests are administered in many universities are unfavourable. This means that:

↳ The exam results based on formal tests per se do not reflect the actual achievements of students.

↳ Any evaluation of the new educational reform on the basis of these results would not be credible.

Specific objectives

This presentation aims at attaining the following specific objectives:

- ❖ To develop a working definition of a large class.

- ❖ To detect problems associated with testing large classes.
- ❖ To point out to some undesirable effects of testing students in adverse conditions.
- ❖ To find out basic Techniques for delivering good quality tests in large classes with optimal reliability and equity.

0. Introduction

In this presentation, I would like to evaluate testing as introduced by the new educational reform against the conditions in our institution –Ibn Zohr University/Faculty of Letters. More specifically, I will try to shed light on problems posed by testing large classes and how this undermines and spoils any reformatory action in the educational system.

No doubt, the new educational reform suffers from certain drawbacks. But it is unfair to put all the blame on it. The conditions under which the new reform is being implemented are unfavourable. Therefore, any evaluation would lack objectivity if it does not take this variable into account. A consideration of the conditions under which tests are administered in our university provides a pertinent basis to easily prove this statement.

It is worth mentioning at the outset that the ideas and conclusions discussed here are the outcome of personal observations and informal discussions with colleagues and students.

1. Evaluation in the New Educational Reform

The two words "*testing*" and "*evaluation*" stand for the same meaning in many languages. But in English, the term "*evaluation*" is considered more general than the term "*testing*". Because we do not only evaluate teaching and learning, but testing should be evaluated as well.

Now and within the framework of the new educational reform, teachers are more than ever concerned with evaluation as the latter has become interdependent to learning objectives. In other words, evaluation is now built up in the instructional program and is considered an integral part of the teaching/learning process.

In the previous educational system, students' evaluation relies mainly on formal written tests and/or oral exams. The new reform stipulates that the evaluation of learners' progress be carried out in different ways: In addition to formal tests and "continuous or permanent assessment", learning can also be evaluated in many other ways such as: projects, homework, oral conversation, participation, and class behaviour.

Actually, testing is important for both learners and teachers. A good test can help learners make their learning better. Because when correcting tests students will know their mistakes and correct them. Also good results make students feel satisfied and motivated to do more efforts. However if a test is to attain these objectives, it must be taken in suitable and adequate conditions.

At this level a question is in order: to what extent do the conditions of our institutions allow the implementation of testing as required by the new educational reform? To answer this question let us put first things first and define the concept of "a large class".

What is a Large Class?

A large class can be defined on the basis of various criteria. For example, the students' number, discipline, educational equipments, facilities, etc. Here are some of these definitions:

- "Large classes have more than 100 students enrolled".

- "There is no fixed number. The large class depends on the discipline- for example; engineering, science and medicine require small classes but arts, humanities, and social sciences can tolerate large classes.
- "A large class is one with more students than available facilities can support".
- The resources can no longer cope with the number of students if you desire individual attention for the students.

I think there is no agreed definition of a large class in the literature, nor should there be. One person's large class is what some others consider as 'regular', 'small' or 'normal'. Some teachers simply define it as "a class which is significantly larger than you are used to". Some others define it as "too many students to learn names by the end of the semester." One thing is sure, whether we have a working definition or not, the phenomenon exists. And since we have identified some of the characteristics, let us proceed and assess the situation in our university.

Do we have large classes in our university?

This question is legitimate since the minister of education Mr. Lahbib Malki in one of his interviews with the press once said, "I would not consider crowded a classroom which consists of 60 students in a lycée". Thus, if our minister does not consider a classroom with 60 students in a lycée as being crowded, then - for sure- it cannot be so for him at the university even with the number of 100 students.

Many teachers in our university would consider it a luxury to have a maximum of thirty or even fifty students in a single class. The fact is that they customarily have to deal with many times that number. The number of students in the majority of groups exceeds one hundred (100). Surely such numbers are a challenge to any teacher no matter how skilful and patient he might be. It is also a considerable impediment to the implementation of any reform regardless of how efficient it is.

Last year, in particular, I was troubled to learn that the total of the students I had to teach and evaluate and test in each semester exceeded 1060. They were to be taught in very large rooms. The distance between the place where I should normally stand to use the blackboard and the last seats where some students are seated at the back the classroom is no less than 25 meters. The room is indeed equipped with a microphone system but I have never used it simply because it does not function or because it is locked in an iron box.

Because of the great number of students, the degree of the accumulated temperature becomes unbearably hot. I was thus obliged to let the windows and the door open for air flow. Consequently, I had to compete for the students' attention with noises from outside the classroom.

There were often not enough chairs. If a student comes late he will have to cover the 25 meter distance to the back of the class across the tables to discover at the end that there is no chair left. He had then to walk the same distance back so as to go and look for a chair in another room. Most of the time, he crosses other students who have left there rooms for the same reason. All this is happening, while you have to do your lesson implementing the latest recommendations and requirements brought by the new and magic educational reform!

Whether we agree upon a working definition or not, it is clear that the classes we have in our university are far more than large and the settings in which we teach are pedagogically unsuitable. Surly, to teach in such settings is an enduring experience; to

venture and organize a test to such large classes is a real nightmare. You can only imagine the kinds of problems a teacher would face.

Problems with Testing Large Classes

Some of these problems are:

- Students become names and numbers instead of faces and people.
- Monitoring students' attendance becomes so difficult, if not impossible.
- It is harder to give advice and guidance to every class –if you have many- let alone to give individual advice to every student.
- Overcrowded classrooms have negative effects on students' behaviour while being examined, thus tendency to cheat increases.
- Organisational problems are compounded, making it difficult to schedule the exams, find suitable rooms, provide the required number of volunteer supervisors, etc.
- It is also difficult to give necessary feedback.
- If feedback is given, its quality to students can be much reduced because of the crowdedness in classrooms.
- Students' progress in a large class is not reported upon with a rigour that is similar to that of students in a relatively small class. Not every student in the large class has opportunities of doing assignments, of having continuous assessment and of asking questions in class and of having a feedback on his or her performance.
- Coping with large numbers of assignments and examination scripts is another source of difficulty and problems for teachers.

Since we cannot solve the problem of large classes at the present time, we have to devise techniques for delivering good quality tests to such classes. The following points are to assist those teachers who have responsibility for testing large classes to do so with the least of casualties!

Techniques for delivering good quality tests in large classes

- a. For faster (and probably better) feedback:
 - ✓ Self-assessment, which is best done with reference to known criteria and which leads to the student identifying areas for attention.
 - ✓ Peer-assessment. As with self-assessment, this can be a very good way of giving students quick feedback. NB. These are techniques that can give both the teacher and students a broad idea of their achievements.
- b. For speedy marking or grading:
 - ✓ Multiple-Choice questions: Since multiple-choice questions are amenable to speedy marking or grading, they are well-suited for use in large classes.
 - ✓ Exercises based on chart filling or gap filling.

It is worth noting that these test formats have proved adequate only in testing some subjects and for evaluating a certain type of learned facts. The problem is how to reliably test analytical subjects when you have large classes and at the same time be equitable and objective while correcting the great number of scripts you will have?

Nevertheless, efforts should be made to eliminate or at least minimise cheating. Some of the techniques that can be used in this respect are:

- ✓ While writing questions, leave enough space for the answers to be written on the same sheet.
- ✓ Use only one side of the paper to write the questions, the other side (i.e. overleaf) can be used as a draft.
- ✓ Come early and check beforehand the layout of the tables in the classroom. The patterning of the tables and chairs facilitates the supervision.
- ✓ Supervise the students from different corners of the classroom without being provocative.

But the real challenge is to reach a stage where cheating can be eliminated or at least reduced from our institutions relying on ethical education and moral consciousness of the students per se.

Undesirable Effects

Through out my first year of teaching at this university, I tried to develop and implement these techniques to get the highest possible level of reliability and to lessen the effect of the inappropriate condition under which we test our students. Nevertheless, I admit that the results are still not satisfactory. In fact, some of the upsetting effects of the bad conditions under which the tests are administered are the continuous deterioration of our students' motivation to learn and the increase in the number of cheats. Under the stress of these conditions, the students' passion for learning seems to gradually shrink.

I have spoken to several teachers and I have noticed that teaching large classes negatively affects their motivation and self-esteem as well. Although many teachers could manage a class of almost any size successfully, this could often be at the expense of their own well being and the range of learning experiences offered to students. Many teachers of large classes feel they spend too much time on organising and managing evaluation activities.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this presentation, I tried to share my personal experience with you hoping that the ideas discussed here will generate some new ideas for teachers who work in the same circumstances. I intended also to show that not any educational reform can survive let alone succeed, if the responsables continue to ignore the priorities of reform in the educational system of our country. As a matter of fact, by distancing themselves from the actual hardships suffered in our institutions, the responsables only add another factor to the actual problems. Perhaps what our educational system needs most today is not a series of reforms but a true concern with its continuously deteriorating infrastructure.

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From the editors

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Institution

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Amount paid

Mode of payment

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Date:
Signature